

THE
NATURE
AND
OBLIGATION
OF
VIRTUE.

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The Nature and Obligation of Virtue.

A
S E R M O N
PREACHED IN THE
Parish-Church of *St. Chad, Salop,*
AT THE
PRIMARY VISITATION
OF THE
Lord Bishop of LICHFIELD,

And published at his Lordship's Request.

WITH AN
A P P E N D I X,
CONTAINING
NOTES on the same Subject.

By *WILLIAM ADAMS, M. A.*

Vicar of *St. Chad's, Salop;*

Chaplain to the Lord Bishop of *Landaff;*

And late Fellow of *Pembroke College, Oxford.*

L O N D O N,

Printed by E. SAY, in *Ave-Mary-Lane:*

And Sold by A. MILLAR, in the *Strand;*

J. WHISTON and B. WHITE, in *Fleet-Street;*

And Messrs. DODSLEY, in *Pall-Mall.*

M, DCC, LIV.

The Nature and Obligation of Virtue

A

SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

Parish-Church of St. Chad, Salop.

AT THE

PRIMARY VISITATION

OF THE

Lord Bishop of Lichfield,

And published at his Lordship's Request.



A P P I X

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And Messrs. DODDERS, in Pall-Mall.

M. DCC. LII.

To the RIGHT REVEREND

FREDERICK,

LORD BISHOP OF

LICHFIELD and COVENTRY.

MY LORD,

YOUR Lordship's approbation of the following discourse does great honour to its author. He is not however so vain, as to promise himself that it will, upon a stricter scrutiny, appear in every point approved even to your Lordship's candour. In a long train of reasoning upon a subject as difficult and abstruse as any other, many things may appear, upon a transient hearing, to the quickest discernment fair and plausible, which will not bear a closer examination. Your Lordship's judgment will not therefore, it is hoped, be questioned, if some particulars in it, which the author himself is far from not suspecting, may be thought liable to doubt or exception. It was enough to recommend it to your

iv. **DEDICATION.**

Lordship's good opinion, if any new light appeared to be brought into a subject which has so much employed and divided the learned and inquisitive, or if only a fair attempt was made towards it. As such only he presumes to offer it to your Lordship and the publick, glad of the opportunity of professing to the world his sincere esteem and honour for your Lordship's amiable character.

Y O U R Lordship's approbation of the following discourse does great honour to its author. It is not now ever so vain, as to promise himself that it will, upon a further scrutiny, appear in every point approved even to your Lordship's candour. In a long train of tedious and ab-
Dutiful and obedient Servant.
Your Lordship's judgment will not therefore be questioned, if some particulars in it, which the author himself is far from not suspecting, may be thought liable to doubt or exception. It was enough to recommend it to your

W. Adams.

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ROMANS ii. 14, 15.

These, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing, or else excusing one another.

THE Apostle here affirms of the Gentiles, that, though they were strangers to the written or revealed will of God, they had yet a law to conduct themselves by, a law written in their hearts; their conscience with the right of a legislator dictating their duty, and their reason as a judge acquitting or condemning them.

It is a general truth implied in this, that all intelligent beings are a law to themselves; that reason implies duty and obligation; and that whoever by this light

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can discern betwixt good and evil, must at the same time see that he is bound to pursue the one, and avoid the other. A careful attention to this great truth will clear up much of the difficulty that has been found in settling the first principles and foundation of morality, and in particular will, I think, lead us to the justest notions of the nature and obligation of virtue; a subject which, though much controverted, seems still to lie open for inquiry.

It is granted, that in life and conduct, in judging of manners and characters, men are generally agreed, and have nearly the same sentiments: and 'tis therefore less to be lamented, though the more to be wondered, that in the theory and speculation they so widely differ. Much of this difference, it is natural to think, may lie in the use of words, to which men assign different ideas, when in the things themselves they are agreed. It would, however, be easy to point out many dangerous consequences, that may arise from the principles sometimes laid down by writers on this subject, if their systems were

were adopted in practice; and will therefore be matter, not of curiosity only, but of great use, if we can learn to form just conceptions; and to express ourselves clearly and distinctly, on a subject confessedly of the greatest importance, and indeed fundamental to all religion, natural and revealed.

The mind of man is formed for contemplation and action: reason is his guide in both. In contemplating the beauty, order, and proportion of outward objects, we are obliged to use the instrumentality of our senses: and therefore, whether these are characters in the object of a fixed and positive kind, or depend in part on the senses, and are therefore so far arbitrary and factitious, we cannot perhaps determine. It may be possible, that what is now beauty to the eye, or harmony to the ear, might by a different formation of the organ have been made to appear deformity and discord.

But there is another field of contemplation, that is purely intellectual. Truth and virtue, which we discover by com-

paring the abstracted ideas of the mind, and contemplating the actions and characters of men, these are the province and peculiar of reason; which lie open in some degree to the lowest of rational beings, but are far above the level of instinct, sense, or passion. Of these we may safely assert, that they are as fixed and unchangeable as reason itself. While reason continues what it is, truth and virtue will appear to it the same. The constancy and immutability of the former is plainly acknowledged and proved in the whole intercourse of men with each other: why else do we demand the assent of men to the most evident and demonstrated truths, if we were not certain that truth must appear the same, as far as it is understood, to all intelligent beings? Objects themselves may be changed or destroyed: but our reasonings concerning them will be equally true, whether they have any real, or only a possible existence. The faculty of perceiving truth may be destroyed, or reason may be taken from us: but, while this remains, truth will appear always the same. We may without arrogance affirm, that it is not in the power

power of the supreme Being to alter its nature : it is immutable and necessary, *the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.*

In like manner, in contemplating actions and characters, right and wrong appear to the mind as certainly and as necessarily distinct from each other, as fixed and invariable in their nature. We are as certain that they must appear the same to all beings that have reason and understanding to receive the ideas, — that they are the same in all climates, in all ages, in all worlds. As every true proposition is universally true, so every right action, the same circumstances supposed, is universally right. It is not in the power of omnipotence itself to alter or invert its nature, to transmute the character of right into wrong, or to make treachery, falsehood, and ingratitude appear in the same light with honesty, fidelity, and gratitude.

If it be asked, what it is that constitutes right, by what rule or standard it is to be measured and tried ; the same may be equally questioned concerning truth. And, in answer to both, we may as well
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ask, by what criterion does the eye distinguish colours? The object is presented, and its properties and qualities appear with it: the ideas of colour, shape, and proportion, that belong to it, necessarily arise in the mind. Actions are as plainly an object to the understanding; and, when surveyed or contemplated, their characters appear with them. We necessarily see them under the character of right, indifferent, or wrong. This right in actions is not ordinarily discovered by any process of reason, but by simple perception: the understanding sees it: and we may as well ask of the most obvious quantities, why some are greater than other, why the square, for instance, is greater than the root, as why some actions are better than other.

In investigating truths, we set out with such as are known and acknowledged, and from thence infer others that are nearly, and then more remotely, connected with them. In proving the truth of any doubted proposition, we appeal to those that are more known, till we arrive at such as are seen or self-evident. But in
morals

morals almost the whole of duty appears with this first self-evidence: it is immediately seen and felt, and wants not by the slow deductions of reason to be proved.

There are indeed cases where different rights or duties interfere, in which the skill of the casuist or civilian is wanting to weigh the moments of each, and to judge upon the whole which claim preponderates. But even here the several rights that are thus involved are distinctly seen by their own evidence; and the difficulty usually lies in affigning to each its due. The right and wrong in most actions stands out prominent and conspicuous even to a careless observer. Our duty appears by its own light, and is not left to be reasoned out or proved by inferring one truth from another.

However this be, whether right be, as I think, in all simple and unmixed cases immediately seen, or whether it be by a short process of the mind inferred, it is, I think, too evident to be doubted that the characters of actions, as right or wrong, appear to the reasoning faculty with a
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light and evidence that cannot be resisted, Moral discernment is as natural and essential to reason, as logical. To suppose a man without the faculty of distinguishing truth from falsehood, is to suppose him void of reason and the powers of thought : to suppose him incapable of discerning right from wrong, is in like manner to divest him of understanding, and to degrade him to the level of brutes.

Reason then implies in it a knowledge of good and evil, and points out the former with authority under the idea of right ; saying, *This is the way, walk ye in it.* Rational beings have a rule of action within them ; and this rule is one and the same to all intelligent beings thro' the universe. We may say, with reverence, that God, who has no law, no superior to controul his will, is a law unto himself ; his unerring reason directing, and his unbiaſſed will invariably pursuing, what is right. And the same reason, as far as he has imparted it in different degrees to his creatures, is their law, a law written in their minds ; their conscience witnessing to it, and, as they obey

obey or neglect it, accusing or else excusing them. To do always what is right is the privilege and character of infinite wisdom and goodness. Beings of a limited capacity are liable in all degrees to failure and imperfection, — to deviate in their judgment from truth, in their actions from right. Man in particular has many principles of action which in their influence run counter to reason, many importunate appetites and headstrong passions ready to dispute her authority, and to usurp the sovereignty over him. To keep these within proper bounds, to direct them to their true objects, and to subdue them to the governance of reason, this is virtue; which may be defined the conformity of imperfect beings to the dictates of reason, or to right.

We say not of the divine Being, that he is virtuous: *he is righteous and holy in all his ways and works.* But virtue is a degrading character, when applied to the Deity. The reason is, that it implies trial and conflict. Virtue in every action is measured by the difficulty that attends it, and bears exact proportion to

the effort that is made to surmount this difficulty. There would be no virtue in temperance, if there were no allurements to excess. Could we suppose man free from temptation, divest him of his appetites and passions, he might be then more perfect, because more easily swayed and governed by reason: but his best actions would no longer carry any proof of virtue in them. In like manner, as God has implanted many passions and good affections in the mind to excite us to duty, whatever good we do from these principles, and not from reason, so far is lost of the merit and virtue of the action. In proportion as the motives to duty are stronger, a stricter conformity to right will be necessary to give a proof of equal virtue in the agent: where more is given, more will be required: and the offering of a mite in some circumstances will outweigh a talent in others.

And, as this is of the essence and character of virtue, so, properly speaking, this is the only virtue. Temperance, justice, and the rest, are duties distinct in their nature and object: but virtue is
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in all these the same. If we are temperate from natural inclination or complexion, if we give all our goods to feed the poor from any other consideration than that of conforming to our duty, there is so far no virtue in it. Actions themselves have no character, are no farther virtuous, than as they indicate virtue in the agent. But the only virtue there is conformity to reason, or a steady and resolved adherence to what is right.

The next question then will be, what it is that makes this conformity a duty, or in what does the obligation to virtue and right action consist? To this I answer, that right implies duty in its idea. To perceive that an action is right, is to see a reason for doing it in the action itself, abstracted from all other considerations whatsoever. Now, this perception, this acknowledged rectitude in the action, is the very essence of obligation; that which commands the approbation and choice, and binds the conscience, of every rational being. External considerations or motives may make it our interest or prudence to act; but this alone can make

or constitute duty. Right, indifferent, and wrong are specifically opposed to each other. A right action cannot therefore by the terms be indifferent: the bare omission of it, and not only the contrary action, is wrong, and carries self-condemnation along with it. The perception therefore of right implies duty. And this is the only obligation purely moral, the only obligation that there is any merit or virtue in complying with.

I am not here speaking of the force and efficacy of this principle, but of its authority and pre-eminence. In the present corrupt and frail state of mankind there are, it is certain, many other principles more prevailing, — *lusts of the flesh, which war against the spirit, and bring us into captivity to the law of sin.* But it is as certain, that, without these temptations to the contrary, reason would always govern; that, where it is unhappily overruled by lust or passion, it still maintains its right: and we are, even when we desert her service, obliged, in spite of ourselves, to acknowledge her authority as a law written in our hearts, and to submit

submit to her reproaches, while our own thoughts accuse and condemn us. To act from reason, is to act with our own judgment, and, consequently, to be self-approved. To deviate from right, is to act contrary to our own sense of things, to act against the consent of our minds, and therefore is to be self-condemned.

But, if virtue be thus founded wholly on the reasonableness of action, may there not often appear reasons on the other side, that will cancel and overrule this obligation? Will not prudence and duty be often found to interfere, and the same reason, which pronounces an action right to be done, at the same time declare it imprudence and folly to do it? Every man has a private end to pursue, and is made invincibly to love and desire his own happiness. If virtue then imply trial, difficulty, and self-denial, what shall oblige him to forego the pleasures that court his choice, for the sake of that virtue, which not only forbids them, but perhaps may expose him to real pain and trouble? Is he not rather in these circumstances obliged

obliged to consult his happiness, and to fly from pain and misery?

To this I answer, first, that nothing can bring us under an *obligation* to do what appears to our moral discernment wrong. It may be supposed our interest to do this; but it cannot be *supposed* our duty. For I ask, if some power, which we are unable to resist, should assume the command over us, and give us laws which are unrighteous and unjust, should we be under any obligation to obey him? should we not rather be obliged to shake off the yoke, and to resist such usurpation, if it were in our power? However then we might be swayed by fear or hope, it is plain that we are under an obligation to right, which is antecedent, and in order and nature superior, to all other. Power may compel, interest may bribe, and pleasure persuade; but reason only can oblige: this is the only authority which rational beings can own, and to which they can owe obedience.

But, secondly, virtue, though exposed to many crosses and distresses, is yet not left

left so destitute and friendless as this objection supposes. If it implies trial and difficulty, it implies too victory in the trial, and a rational joy and triumph in its own integrity. Whatever we lose or suffer in the cause of virtue, our moral worth and excellence are increased in the same proportion. And this is no fantastic, chimerical good, but the most real and substantial we can possess. All other goods perish in the using; all other pleasures are lost in the enjoyment: but for these we are the happier and better for ever. Every improvement in virtue is an acquisition made, which time cannot impair, nor rapine invade: and the virtuous triumph, with which the mind exults that has stood superior to temptation, is for the most part a sufficient compensation for the difficulties that attend it.

I might here add the conscious sense that all other intelligent beings must approve such a conduct; the character, esteem, and love, that belong to it; which, though they carry no obligation in them, may yet be considered as natural sanctions of virtue, and ought to be laid

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in the ballance against the motives of pleasure and interest, that would seduce us from our duty.

On the other hand, whatever is gained by deserting our duty is dearly paid for in that shame and remorse that attend it; which are real evils, and as severely felt as bodily pain and torture. "Whoever," says *Tully*, "violates the law of reason, renounces his nature, and will be rigorously chastised for his disobedience, though he may escape what we commonly call punishment." *

Thus far then moral and natural good go together. We are made not blindly to love ourselves, but to love what is amiable, good, and worthy in ourselves. The mind delights in its own perfection, and can acquiesce in nothing else as an end or object worthy of its pursuit. In proportion as it advances towards this end, it surveys itself with joy and gratulation; and, on the other hand, it cannot forgive or be at peace with itself, while it acts unworthily: it necessarily laments every

fall from virtue, as a proof of weakness and degeneracy, and, in proportion to this sense and feeling of ill-desert, becomes the object of its own contempt and hatred.

The pleasures which I have mentioned, of self-esteem and joy in our own worth, which are peculiar to virtue, seem to be purely rational, — not to proceed from passion, or any inferior principle in our nature, but from reason only: and therefore, though they cannot be the ground of virtue, or come within the notion of obligation, yet are they pleasures of the purest kind, and seem much less than any external motive to take from the merit of virtue. The love of virtue is the purest principle of virtue; and therefore the love of virtue in ourselves is so far a virtuous self-love.

But it must be confessed, that, as these pleasures are purely rational, so, considered as an adequate sanction to virtue, they are adapted only to beings that are purely rational. Man, to return to the objection, is a sensible as well as intellectual being; subject, as such, to many

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wants and infirmities, to much pain and misery: and virtue is not only left exposed to these, but they are sometimes the certain effect and consequence of it. The best of men therefore, however cheered by the consolations of virtue, may be unhappy in a great degree under the common wants and sufferings of life. In these circumstances it seems necessary to give up the obligations of virtue, or to allow that man is an ill-constituted being; those who deserve best being necessarily miserable, either by forfeiting their virtue, and incurring the reproach of their own hearts, or exposing themselves by their adherence to it to the evils of life.

But here, thirdly, religion comes in to our aid: which teaches us, that we are under the government of a wise and good being; that virtue is his will, a necessary, but sure title to his favour; that, whatever inequalities appear in this life, all will be adjusted in another, in which every one shall receive according to his deeds. This, which reason alone might teach to the wise and prudent, God has revealed also unto babes. Here then the objection

objection before us vanishes: virtue and happiness are found at last to coincide, and the scheme of moral duty and obligation to be consistent with the nature and constitution of man.

But, if these principles are necessary to the support of virtue, are they not, it will be inquired, the proper ground and obligation of it? Are not the authority of God, his right to give laws to his creatures, and his power of dispensing eternal rewards and punishments, the surest foundation to build morality upon? To this it must be answered, that the sovereign perfections of God are undoubtedly a reason for the highest reverence and homage we can pay him, the lowest prostration of heart and mind that we can express before him. The most perfect submission is due to *his* will, who is wisdom and goodness itself; the most entire devotion to his service, who made us what we are, and gave us all that we possess. But these duties derive their obligation from the principle we have been establishing. It is in the highest degree reasonable, that we resign our will, and

even our reason, to his will, who, we are previously assured, can ordain nothing but what is right and good : and therefore all his commands, even though we should not be able to discern the reason and equity of them, have a claim to our obedience. It is meet and right, that we pay a chearful submission to his will, to whom we owe our very selves, and all our powers of acting and thinking. Obedience then to the will of God, when revealed or known, is upon this principle the first and highest duty of all created beings. The authority of God, as our creator and governor, his wisdom and goodness, are so many additional obligations to virtue. But, however these obligations are multiplied, they are still one in kind, deriving all their force from reason and right.

With respect to the last principle here mentioned, the sanctions of rewards and punishments which God has annexed to his laws, these have not in any proper sense the nature of obligation. They are only motives to virtue, adapted to the state and condition, the weakness and insensibility

fibility of man. They do not make or constitute duty, but presuppose it. To act against them is not so properly sin, as folly and madness. It will follow likewise, as I am forced to acknowledge, that to act merely from these motives, without any regard to reason or conscience, if this were possible, is not virtue, however it might be thought prudence or interest. These are, however, the best helps to virtue, as they serve to awaken the attention of thoughtless mankind, to call them off from the cares and pleasures in which they are immersed, and from sensible to spiritual objects. When the mind is turned to contemplate virtue, its obligations will appear with it; we shall necessarily approve it for its own sake; and our reason and understanding will be brought into captivity to it. Besides, the nature of man is such, that, by whatever means he is brought into a certain course and tenor of action, it will soon become his pleasure and choice. An uniform practice of duty will make it natural and habitual to us, and will soon induce a love of it. We shall insensibly adopt the true principle of

virtue;

virtue, and learn to be subject for conscience sake.

The conclusions, that most deserve our notice, from what has been said, are,

First, that virtue, and the obligation of it, are not founded in will, or power, or in the arbitrary appointment of any being whatsoever; that the laws of God himself are not therefore righteous, merely because they are commanded, but are therefore commanded, because they are antecedently and in their own nature righteous. Reason and right are the eternal rule of action by which the will of God himself is directed. To act invariably by this rule is infinite goodness, righteousness, and moral perfection: and therefore to ascribe this to God is to pay him the honour due unto his name. This universal rule applies itself differently to the different ranks and systems of intelligent beings, and will call for very different duties, according to their different capacities, relations, and circumstances. The end and design of revelation is to give the highest explicit authority to this rule, as well

well as to adapt it to the nature and condition of man, and to provide for his infirmities and wants in the practice of it. By its aptitude to this end every religion must be tried. To this test the scriptures appeal, as a necessary proof of their truth. And this is the characteristic excellence and the great internal evidence of Christianity, that all its precepts, doctrines, and instituted duties are calculated in the highest manner to promote moral righteousness. Upon this principle are founded all the claims of merit and excellence which it asserts to itself; that *its statutes are right, and rejoice the heart*; that *they are just and true and righteous altogether*; that *the righteousness of its testimonies is everlasting, and its law is truth*.

A second consequence from what has been said is, that virtue and its obligation are not founded in any good affections, such as benevolence, compassion, and the like; nor in any blind impulse, instinct, or moral sense. By this latter indeed if we understand the different sentiments towards right and wrong in the understanding, this will coincide with the principle which

which we have been explaining. But, if be meant by it only an instinctive approbation of virtue, and a certain refined taste for the beauties and excellencies of it, as it is generally explained by those who defend it, this is to make the nature of virtue wholly precarious and arbitrary, to suppose that men might have been intelligent beings without any attachment to it, or even with sentiments and affections wholly inverted, and directed to the contrary objects; since the pleasing sensations, which are now the incitement and sanction of virtue, might consistently with this hypothesis have been given to its contrary.

There is a third opinion not less repugnant to the principles we have been asserting, which places the essence of virtue in a conformity of our actions and affections to the publick good, and the obligation or sole motive to the practice of it in the present feeling or future prospect of private happiness. But, not to mention that these principles of action seem but ill to agree together, piety and temperance, two very comprehensive duties, will have but a very precarious foundation

dition in this system: and of the more social duties, justice, fidelity, gratitude, we may surely affirm, that these appear to the conscience of every man to be indispensable and necessary, without inquiring into their consequences, either on our own, or the happiness of others. It is true, that God has so wisely ordered the frame and constitution of things, that the practice of virtue has the most natural and general tendency to promote happiness among men. But this connection is not necessary, nor in many particular cases certain: and the foundation of virtue cannot be any thing that is precarious and contingent.

If men are left to infer their duty from any such relation, they will find many ready expedients to evade it. Single instances of duty will be thought of little influence to the publick: it will appear fair and right to commute for private vices by publick benefits: and fraud and imposture will be authorized, as oft as the common good is thought promoted by it. In fact, upon this principle it certainly is, that men have allowed themselves

in the practice of pious forgeries; that persecution is justified in the cause of religion; and that publick faith and truth are so often and openly sacrificed to publick utility. And it is therefore against this species of self-deceit that the Apostle has addressed a very particuler caution — *not to do evil, that good may come.*

I have just observed, that the two principles here laid down, instead of bearing so close an affinity, seem rather to have an unfriendly aspect towards each other. A love of ourselves is not in its natural influence any motive to the good of others: nor is the good of others any direct means of procuring happiness to ourselves. But, however these may be reconciled by religion, and self-love and social be made at last the same, we shall still by the first of these principles be bound in duty to consult our present happiness, as far as it can consist with the publick good. It will be not only innocent and prudent, but virtue, to do so, and immoral to neglect it. And, on the other hand, the duties of life which expose us to most trouble and self-denial, instead of
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having the greater, will have the less virtue in them : for, as far as they interrupt our happiness, we shall act contrary to our obligations in performing them. These consequences must follow : for, if our own happiness be the only reason for consulting that of others, it must be this reason that makes it duty ; and, consequently, to consult our own happiness must be of prior obligation, and a more indispensable duty.

The advocates of this new system have with great force of reason and eloquence demonstrated, that no other motive but a prospect of final happiness can effectually excite to the practice of virtue : but, unhappily, the difference betwixt motive and obligation has been overlooked ; which are so far from being the same, that the former are chiefly addressed, and owe their influence, to the passions ; while the latter applies itself solely, and owes all its authority, to the understanding. The wisdom and expediency of religious sanctions, as motives to virtue, must with all reverence and thankfulness be acknowledged ; and that virtue, too little practised under

these influences, would be ill-supported without them. But still these are but subsidiary to virtue; the nature and duty of which must be first supposed; and then these are added, not to give authority or obligation, but force and influence, or to procure that attention and obedience which are due to it.

A fourth conclusion, which I shall presume to offer, from what has been said, is, that, when virtue is said to consist in a conformity to truth, in acting agreeably to the truth of the case, to the reason, truth, or fitness of things, there is, if not inaccuracy, yet something of obscurity in the expression. It is certain, that, in every virtuous action, truth, or a conviction that the action is right, is the principle or reason upon which we act. But the character of the action, and, consequently, the measure and standard of it, is not truth, but right: nor does the virtue of it consist in a conformity to truth, as such, though it may be said to consist in a conformity to some particular truth, or rule of duty, prescribing what is right. Truth is a term of wider extent
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than right. The character of wisdom or prudence, of skill in any art or profession, are as well founded in a regard to truth, and imply the acting agreeably to the nature and reason of things: yet are these ideas certainly distinct from that of goodness, or moral rectitude. The man who builds according to the principles of geometry acts as agreeably to truth, and he who should transgress the rules of architecture as much violates truth, as he who acts agreeably to the duty of gratitude, or contrary to it: but in the former of these instances the conformity to truth is not virtue, but skill; the deflection from it is not vice, but ignorance or folly. In every truth, which carries moral obligation, right or duty, or something synonymous, must be expressed or understood. If virtue therefore be defined a conformity to truth, it is to such moral truth only as points out what is right. It is the conformity to what reason dictates as right, not what it teaches for true. And this character of actions depends not on any previous truth or reason of things; but its connection with every species of action, or contrariety to it, is, as I have
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above intimated, immediately seen by its own light.

There is yet another sense, very different from this, in which morality has been resolved into truth; which supposes every action to be directly affirming or denying some truth, and accordingly, as it expresses what is true or false, to be right or wrong. Thus the man who injures or designedly hurts another unprovoked, is therefore guilty of a crime, because he virtually affirms the man to be his enemy, when he is not. But, beside that this language of actions is often very equivocal and uncertain, it is plain that in this, and the like may be said of every other case that can be put, the action must be supposed previously wrong, before it can by any construction be made out to be false. For why is this affirming the injured person to be an enemy, but because an innocent person deserves not such treatment, or, in other words, it is contrary to right to treat him thus? It is this last truth by which the action is condemned, and by the violation of which alone it has the character of guilt derived upon it.

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I am unwilling to dismiss this subject without pointing out some of its uses in practice.

First then, let us learn from hence to reverence virtue wherever we find it; not only among those of our own persuasion, sect, or party, but wherever by the force of reason it breaks thro' the impressions of a false, or rejoices in the light of true religion. The seed and principle of virtue, the Apostle has taught us in the text, is sown alike in all; and he seems as plainly to intimate that the poorest Heathen is born to the like hopes and expectations with ourselves. He here tells us, that the Gentiles, which have not the law, may do by nature, by natural reason only, the things contained in, or the moral duties of, the law; that, where this is the case, *their uncircumcision shall be counted for circumcision*: that is, those among the Heathen, who live up to the light which God has given them, in fulfilling the moral duties of religion, shall be accepted of God, though they are not in covenant with him as members
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of his church. They may even by a lower degree of obedience give equal proof of virtue with those who are favoured with higher lights and advantages, and shall accordingly be judged hereafter according to what they have, and not according to what they have not; — those who have lived under the law, by the law; and those who have lived without the law, without the law. They set out behind us, if I may so express myself, in the great race of virtue, happiness, and perfection, which lies for ever and without end before us: but they may by their diligence or our slothfulness overtake us in this world, and be placed, for their reward, far before us in the next. Thus our Saviour has told us, there are first which shall be last, and last which shall be first: *Many, saith he, shall come in that day from the East and from the West, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; and the children of the kingdom shall be cast out.* Instead therefore of despising the error and ignorance of others, let their virtue rather provoke us to jealousy and emulation. Instead of placing a vain security
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in our superior knowledge, and in the present favour of God, let us take heed to ourselves that we make the best use of the advantages we enjoy, that we lose not the things which we have gained, and that no man take our crown from us.

Secondly, let us ever remember that the design of religion is to promote the practice of moral righteousness, and to give weight to the eternal duties of morality. This is the one end of all its doctrines and ordinances, as well as of its precepts. In applying its doctrines to ourselves, or addressing them to others, we should therefore inquire to what uses of piety and virtue they are directed, how the heart may be amended, as well as the mind instructed, by them; in the instituted duties of it, what was the end and design of their appointment, what lesson were they intended to teach us, what motives and incitements to godliness to bring to our minds. By thus applying them to their proper ends, and giving them their due force and direction, we shall find them very powerful instruments in the support and advancement of our

virtue, of great use and efficacy in spiritualizing our affections, and weaning them from the things of this world. But to rest in the belief of opinions, or the practice of ceremonies, as an end, is to mistake their nature, and to lose their use and benefit. To substitute them in the place of real righteousness, is to pervert them into gross superstition.

Lastly, if we would increase in virtue and true piety, let us carefully examine our actions by their true standard, and endeavour to strengthen and improve the virtuous principle within us. Let us remember, that to have kind affections, to be smit with the beauty and excellence of virtue, is not virtue: but to cherish and encourage these within their proper limits, to attend to the ends and uses for which they were given us, and to enter into the wisdom and design of God in giving them, this is virtue. Every attention to improvement, every endeavour after virtue, is virtue itself. In like manner, to have the justest sense of right and wrong, to have the clearest convictions of duty in the mind, is not virtue: but to
endeavour

endeavour to improve this sense by reason and reflection, to keep the virtuous principle ever awake and active in our breasts, this is virtue; and a duty of the greatest importance. The imperfection of our nature requires it. In active life we are exposed to so many temptations, that, if we attend not to this, our virtue will be ever in danger. In retirement temptations will be fewer: but this may be the more necessary, as it is then perhaps the only proof we can give of our obedience. For what assurance can we have in our virtue, when it is never called to the trial, unless we frequently examine our hearts, and root the principles of it deep in the mind? A life of action is the school and theatre of virtue. But, when we have not the opportunity of forming good dispositions into habits by exercise and practice, we may do it in a good degree by contemplation, and especially by the exercises of devotion and religion; which, besides that they are duties indispensable and necessary in all, are also the direct means to sanctify the heart. In this situation we ought studiously to embrace, and even seek out, all opportunities of doing good. Those

who have no temptations to ill should be active to their power in well-doing, and not spend their days in indolence and thoughtlessness, which will infallibly enervate the mind, rob it of all its virtue, and leave it exposed in the day of trial. Thus, by attending carefully to the improvement of the mind, and by observing a proper discipline and œconomy in the government of ourselves, we shall, whether we mix with the world, be armed against its temptations, or, whether sheltered from these in retirement, shall strengthen and increase the virtuous principle within us. In both we shall secure the blessing of God on our endeavours, shall proceed from strength to strength in virtue, shall attain to the things that are more excellent, and go on to perfection.



APPENDIX.

THE subject of the foregoing discourse being closely connected with many questions of difficulty and importance, some of the principal of these it is the design of the following notes to illustrate.

Note to page 9. “ We say not of the
“ divine Being, that he is virtuous.—The
“ reason is, that it implies trial and con-
“ flict. Virtue in every action is measured
“ by the difficulty that attends it.”

But will it not follow from these principles, that virtue and moral perfection are quite different things, since the latter may certainly and must be ascribed to the Deity, though the former, as is here asserted, cannot? And again, if the measure of virtue be the difficulty encountered, will it not seem, that, as men increase in
moral

moral perfection, they may decrease in virtue, since the difficulty of virtue by use and habit becomes less?

To remove these difficulties, let it be observed, that virtue is not properly the character of actions, but rectitude. The virtue of actions is, properly speaking, only that degree of virtue in the agent, which is exerted in performing them: and this must be measured by the difficulty encountered and subdued. But the whole or sum of virtue in the agent is not to be measured by the difficulties that are surmounted, but by these which it is able to surmount, by the power and sufficiency of the agent to overcome difficulties, trials, and temptations; and therefore may be supposed in any degree, where it is not tried by any difficulty at all: for the habit and character of virtue, or the strength of the virtuous principle, may be increased, not only by actual exercise and trial, but, as before observed, by reflection, attention to moral truths, or a right use of our reasoning powers. The force of this principle, as it resides in the hidden man of the heart, can
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be known only to God, the searcher of hearts. To men the virtue of others can be known and estimated only by their actions; which, though not an accurate measure of virtue, is the only measure they can apply: and, the virtue of these being measured by the difficulties attending them, hence in common language virtue always implies trial and difficulty, and is affirmed only of such beings, as are supposed liable to temptation, and capable of sin. But virtue, considered simply in itself, as a moral power of resisting and conquering difficulties, this is throughout the same with moral perfection, righteousness, or goodness, and may be equally ascribed to the supreme Being, whose moral rectitude is more than sufficient to conquer all difficulties.

With respect to the other difficulty mentioned, it is certain, that, as the habits of virtue increase, the difficulty of it in every single instance will decrease. But it is as certain, that the virtue of these habits will bear exact proportion to the difficulties encountered in forming them. And if, in the several repeated acts by which

which any habit of virtue is formed, the last act of virtue be attended with less difficulty than the former, this facility is itself to be considered as a distinct proof of the prevalence of virtue in the agent; and, in estimating the force of the virtuous principle, is to be added to the difficulty of the action. Thus, if to abstain from any unlawful pleasure be twice as easy, the same circumstances of temptation and the same natural advantages or abilities supposed, as it was formerly, this is a proof of twice the virtue in the agent; in like manner as, in trying the natural strength of men, he that can lift or remove a given weight with twice the ease that another can, has twice the strength. Thus then the matter seems to stand: when it is said, that the virtue of actions is measured by the difficulty that attends them, this is as near the truth, as in common speaking we do, or need to go: for the facility of performing duty, acquired by use and habit, cannot be known or estimated by us. But it is not accurately true, unless all external circumstances, and all the circumstances of the agent likewise, that is, all his acquired

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as well as natural abilities, be supposed the same; or unless to the difficulty of the action, simply considered, be added the facility with which it is performed.

NOTE H.

P. 17. "The pleasures, which I have mentioned, of self-esteem and joy in our own worth, are motives of the purest kind, &c."

But, if virtue be always attended with present pleasure, will not our best actions at last be founded in self-love? And how shall we reconcile this with that disinterestedness, which, upon the principle we have laid down, seems almost necessary and essential to it?

In answer to this, it may perhaps be enough to observe, that we cannot conceive the most perfect reason, acting upon the purest principles, not to receive pleasure from virtue. To act against reason or duty must give pain and regret to every intelligent being; and, for the same reason, to conform to right or duty must give pleasure. The enjoyment therefore

of this pleasure, if there be any such thing as virtue, must be consistent with the highest perfection of it. But, to trace this matter as far as we can, it will be proper to consider the several senses in which an agent or action may be said to be disinterested. To be absolutely disinterested, in the largest sense of the word, or to be indifferent to pleasure and pain, is plainly incompatible with the nature of any being whatsoever, and therefore cannot be necessary to virtue. To prefer misery, or to love it equally with happiness, is a contradiction in terms. An agent is then disinterested, in the strictest possible sense of the word, when in any particular action his own interest is in no degree the motive, end, or object of it: and, secondly, in a looser sense, when the action or intention of the agent does not interfere with the interest of others; or more so, when their interest is at least in part consulted by it; and still in a higher degree, when any part of his own interest is voluntarily sacrificed to it.

In the latter of these senses the disinterestedness of virtue will be easily made out,

out. The pleasures that belong to it can never interfere with the pleasure or happiness of another; and to intend injury to any is totally inconsistent with it. In most cases the interest of others is at least in part the immediate object of it, and usually at some expence of ease, happiness, or present interest of our own. There is a chapter in * *Aristotle's Ethics*, in which this subject is professedly treated, and with the usual acuteness of that philosopher: "The mind," says he, "is our
 " proper self: and he that follows this
 " governing principle may therefore be
 " said to gratify and love himself, more
 " properly than he who obeys his appe-
 " tites and passions, which are at best but
 " an inferior part of our nature. The
 " man who divides his fortune with his
 " friend is the greater benefactor to him-
 " self: he makes his friend only the
 " richer by his bounty, but makes him-
 " self the better man. In like manner,
 " the man who gives up his life for his
 " friend or his country, prefers the satis-
 " faction of being greatly good to all the
 " pleasures that an inglorious life can

* *Ad Nicomach. lib. 9. cap. 8.*

“ give him : he chuses to enjoy virtue
 “ for a year or for a day, rather than a
 “ whole life that is uselefs, or spent in
 “ vicious pleasures.” There is then, according to this excellent reasoner, a virtuous as well as a vicious self-love : and to prefer the pleasures of virtue to every other interest is all that is necessary to the highest degree of virtue.

But we may, I think, go farther, and assert the disinterestedness of virtue in the first and strictest sense. For, 1. the pleasures of self-approbation and esteem, which follow virtue, certainly arise from a conscious sense of having made virtue, and not pleasure, our choice ; not from preferring one interest or pleasure to another, but from acting according to right, without any other consideration whatsoever. It seems essential to this pleasure, that no motive of interest have any part in the choice or intention of the agent. And, 2. to make this pleasure an object to the mind, the virtue, whose principle we are seeking after, must be already formed. For let it be observed, that the pleasures we are speaking of are themselves

selves virtuous pleasures; such as none but
 virtuous minds are capable of proposing
 to themselves, or of enjoying. To the
 sensual and voluptuary the pleasures that
 arise from denying our appetites or passions
 have no existence. These cannot there-
 fore be the motive to that virtue which
 is already presupposed. On the contrary,
 they owe their rise and existence to the
 same principle or cause with virtue itself.
 It is the same love of virtue which makes
 it first the object of our pursuit, and,
 when acquired, the subject of our triumph
 and joy. To do a virtuous action for the
 sake of these virtuous pleasures, is to chuse
 virtue for the sake of being virtuous;
 which is to rest in it as an end, or to
 pursue it without regard to any other ob-
 ject or interest.

NOTE III.

P. 20. "The sanctions of rewards and
 " punishments, which God has annexed
 " to his laws, have not in any proper sense
 " the nature of obligation, &c."

The belief of a God and a future state,
 though no way necessary to the nature or
 obligation

obligation of virtue, is yet, without question, of absolute necessity to support it in practice. This hath been already so fully allowed, and is so universally acknowledged, that I need not enlarge upon it. But is not this then a motive of interest? And will not an object of such infinite concern as the prospect of eternal rewards and punishments, be apt to engross our whole attention, and, by excluding or superseding the virtuous principle, annihilate that virtue which it is said to support? As this has been thought a question of great difficulty, it will deserve a particular attention,

First then, it is certain, that the force of this motive is by no means so great as is here supposed. Were these momentous objects present to our view, or had we any sensible experience of them, our liberty, it might be thought, would be overruled: our passions would be so strongly excited, that there would be no room for reason or virtue to act. But, with respect to the things of another life, we walk by faith, not by sight. The distance of these in prospect, and the darkness

darkness in which they are involved, diminish them to our view, and reduce their influence on the lives of men, in comparison, to very little. As they cannot be objected to our senses, so neither can they be pictured out by the imagination, the only instrument by which distant objects excite and move the passions. Hence our attention is left open to all the sollicitations of sense and appetite, and there is ample room left for the exercise and trial of our virtue. On the other hand, we are not only at liberty to attend to the purer principles of virtue, but it seems a principal end and effect of these external motives to awaken and turn our attention to these principles, and to give them their full force on the mind: and whoever is by the joint influence of these motives reclaimed from vice, and not only entered upon a course of virtuous action, but confirmed in the steady practice and habit of it, will, I doubt not, owe more of his virtue to the latter of these principles, than to the former. I am persuaded, that no one ever repented of the folly of sin, without repenting at the same time of the guilt,

guilt, and feeling the shame of having acted unworthily; and that we never forsake, without abhorring, that which is evil.

Secondly, if we have any idea at all of the happiness of a future state, it is that of virtuous exercise and virtuous enjoyment. We can form no other conception of the happiness of angels, but that of a more exalted piety and benevolence, exerting themselves in a more exalted and extended sphere. But to make this our object and aim is, as we have seen, entirely consistent with virtue. It is a motive only to virtuous minds; and, as it owes its force to the principle of virtue already rooted in the mind, so it will reciprocally strengthen this principle within us. Indeed, our hopes and fears in another life, whatever be supposed the object of them, will be found in great part to derive their force from the love of God and goodness. It is a love of goodness that makes us attribute this as a perfection to the Deity; and it is from this perfection alone that we expect a reward to virtue. And again, in proportion as

we love virtue ourselves, we shall think it the object of the love and favour of God; and, in proportion as we hate sin, we shall think it the object of his displeasure.

Thirdly, our hopes in another life, as far as they have no certain or determinate object, will be found to be nothing more than a pious trust or implicit faith in the goodness of God: for it is on this at last that our future expectations are built. And even our future fears, as far as they are a motive of action, and lead to repentance, will resolve into the same principle, and must imply a belief in the goodness of God, and trust in his mercy. But this trust or faith in God is a duty we owe him, and an act of piety and true virtue. To believe in him whom we have not seen; to resign all our cares and interests into his hands; to commit our souls unto him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator, unmoved by pleasure, unshaken by pain; to maintain our allegiance to heaven, when we seem most forsaken by it, under torture of body, and dejection of mind; this is the virtue of
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faith,

faith, and is doing the greatest honour we can to the goodness and truth of God: and, as it is the highest character to which human virtue, or perhaps any other, can aspire, so, whatever there may be of interestedness, there is certainly more of the love of God and goodness, than of any other principle, in it.

Should the laws of our country inculcate virtue, and threaten vice with punishment; and should a righteous and perfect administration insure favour and reward to the good, and the merited infliction of punishment on the bad; a good subject, who wanted not these motives or restraints, would love his duty the more: and, when he considers virtue as the principle in the lawgiver or prince, from which these salutary laws derive their existence and their force, as that which gives peace and order to the society in which he lives, his love and esteem for virtue will still increase: he will love his prince for the character of goodness that belongs to him, will delight in pleasing, and fear to displease him; which is another addition of strength to the virtuous principle.

principle. His love for virtue then, considered as an object in itself, and his attachment to his duty, will be greatly increased, at the same time that his hopes and fears have another object presented to them, which has a distinct weight and force. In the mean time the bad under such a government will be reclaimed. If he has incurred guilt, and the penalty annexed to it, his only refuge will be in goodness; in the goodness of his prince, and in his own reformation, or a new principle of goodness wrought in his mind. In the end true virtue only will be rewarded, and the incorrigible offender alone punished. In like manner, the virtuous mind, when it considers virtue as the law of God, and as the object of his love, will naturally love it the more; and, when he considers goodness or rectitude as a law to God himself, as the ruling principle of the Deity, as the fountain of eternal order and harmony thro' the universe, his love will rise into adoration: he will hearken with more reverence and devotion to the everlasting law of reason, which reigns with such sovereign authority over heaven and earth;

his duty will appear still more the glory of his nature; and sin will seem more exceeding sinful: and when, farther, he considers this supreme Judge of merit as a witness not only to his outward actions, but to the secret motions of the heart, he will be more careful to purify the inner man, and to establish the true principle of virtue there. The belief therefore of a righteous Providence and a future state is so far from extinguishing or debasing the virtuous principle, that it highly strengthens and exalts it.

And therefore, lastly, if revelation gives new evidence to these doctrines, it so far contributes to the advantage and improvement of virtue; and these are indeed every-where consulted, and provided for, by it. If it has set the prospects of a future state in a clearer light, it has at the same time more strongly represented the reasonableness of our duty, and the excellence and god-like nature of virtue. It has set the love of God before us in many new and more engaging lights, and in return calls for all our love and gratitude, and every generous affection of the heart,

heart, in his service. The promises it makes are not to the outward act and appearance, but to the habit and character of virtue. We are required to give God the heart; to love him, and, of consequence, to love our duty, with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength; we are taught that, if we give all our goods to feed the poor, without the true principle of charity, it will be nothing worth. If it commands our attention to the recompence of reward, it is to raise us above the weakness of human nature; it is to keep the love of God and virtue alive under the severest trials; to prepare us to cut off a right hand, and to pluck out a right eye, to part with houses and lands, with wife and children, for conscience and virtue's sake. In these circumstances it is a necessary help and advantage to the cause of virtue, and entirely consistent with all its interests, to have our duty, on the one hand, clearly marked out in its full extent, that we may not by the delusions of self-love be led to contract the sphere, or soften the rigour of it; and, on the other hand, that wisdom may be justified of her children,

children, to be assured that merit and happiness, virtue and prudence, will at last coincide.

Upon the whole, the belief of a God and a future state are so closely connected with the first principles of reason, that it may be reckoned almost inseparable from it: and hence, in fact, these doctrines have been almost universally received among men. And it is as certain, that a sense of merit and good-desert in virtue is likewise universal and inseparable from reason. These doctrines therefore must be consistent, and stand in the fairest agreement together. To do what is right, because it is right, and to believe that the Governor of the world will do so too, are principles that can never thwart or oppose, but must mutually strengthen and confirm each other: they are in reason and nature united, and make up jointly the source and perfection of virtue.

NOTE IV.

P. 28. " When virtue is said to consist in a conformity to truth, to the truth of the case, to the reason and
" nature

“nature of things, there is, if not im-
 propriety, something of obscurity or
 inaccuracy in the expression.”

Obligation in morals is not indiscrimi-
 nately any reason for acting, but such a
 reason only, as makes the action duty,
 and the performance of it virtue. This
 reason must be an immediate or more
 remote connection between the action and
 duty or right. For, when you ask whe-
 ther any particular action is duty, or ob-
 ligen as such; how can this be proved,
 but by shewing its connection with some
 known duty, or in the last resort, as in
 the case of all first truths, appealing to
 the conscience and reason of every man?
 It seems therefore too general and loose
 a way of speaking to make virtue consist
 in an agreement with truth, or the reason
 of things; when the only reason that car-
 ries obligation in it is in all cases the
 rectitude or goodness of the action, and
 the only truth which binds to action is
 that which points out the connection be-
 twixt the action and this rectitude: and
 this relation betwixt the action and right,
 and no other, is that foundation in the
 reason

reason and nature of things, upon which all moral obligation is built. To explain this more fully, let us see what is properly meant by the reason and nature of things, and by acting agreeably to them.

There is an old maxim in the schools, which is full of good sense: *Essentie rerum sunt aeternae*. The nature of man is for ever the same; that is, the ideas which make up the definition of a man will be always the same, whether any such being actually exist, or not. The third book of *Euclid* would be equally true, if no such thing as a perfect circle ever existed. The existence of any thing, as a triangle or circle, only supposed, a number of properties, relations, and truths depending on these, will result with it. The real connection or relation betwixt things or ideas is truth or reason in the object, or what we mean by the reason or truth of things. Reason is the faculty of perceiving, comparing, and observing the connection betwixt these ideas. Right reason is this faculty free from and uncorrupted by prejudice, &c. and seeing these connections as they really are.

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Here then it is plain, that from the relations and habitudes of things and persons to each other actions take a different name and character. What is in some cases justice, will in others be called murder or parricide: of consequence, as the situation or circumstances of the agent vary, his obligations will vary with them. But the rule of duty never varies. The connection between every species of action and the ideas of right and wrong is always the same: for in the idea of every moral action the circumstances of the agent are always included. And this connection is as much founded in the nature of things, as any truth whatsoever. Were there but one agent in the universe, and, consequently, no such thing as giving or receiving benefits, the nature of gratitude would be the same that it is now: it would be as true then, as it is now, that the party who receives a benefit ought to requite it with love and kindness to his benefactor. It is then an eternal truth, that gratitude is right or duty. Hence it is rightly said, that this duty is founded in the nature and relation of things, or that there is a reason in nature for per-

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forming

forming it. But this reason I suppose to be nothing else but the agreement betwixt the idea of gratitude and right, or the conformity of the action to the idea of right. The relation betwixt the party obliged and his benefactor makes the action gratitude, and, *by consequence*, brings him under obligation; because gratitude is duty: but the immediate ground of obligation is not this relation, but the connection betwixt gratitude and right. Hence, in all language, the man who acts virtuously is said to act right, or agreeably to what is right and duty. And this appears to me more proper, than to say that he acts according to truth; and more clear and distinct, than to say that he acts according to the reason and nature of things; the meaning of which will, I think, in all cases be found to be only this, — that he acts according to what reason, in the present circumstances of the agent, and the relation he stands in to the object before him, pronounces to be right.

NOTE V.

P. 29. "And this character of actions
 "depends not on any previous truth or
 "reason

“ reason of things ; but its connection
 “ with every species of action, or con-
 “ trariety to it, is immediately seen by
 “ its own light.”

Right is a simple uncompounded idea, and, consequently, cannot be explained but by example. In considering the actions of men, the mind forms to itself general abstracted ideas of gratitude, justice, mercy, temperance, and the contrary to these. Again, in comparing these, it finds other more general characters, in which they agree or disagree. Such are those of right, wise, good, and the contrary. The last of these characters being an equivocal term, and signifying either the goodness of the action in itself, or its relative goodness to the agent or others, the first of these senses is what we mean, and is better expressed by the word right. The connection betwixt which and the several species of action above-mentioned being intuitively seen, the several truths resulting from it, such as, gratitude is right, &c, will form so many general rules of action ; and these are self-evident or first truths, from which there can lie no appeal, and for the truth of which there is no previous

vious truth to appeal to. Hence the rule of duty in all common cases is clear to every understanding, and will be found, if I mistake not, in all its complications to depend upon a very few principles, which are simple, easy, and obvious to all capacities.

We know from our own sense and feeling in what the happiness or good of others consists. Then, that every man's life, health, ease, &c. are his own, and not another's—that he has a right to defend them against every invader—that to invade them without provocation is wrong—that to contribute to these, or any other way to promote the good or happiness of others, is right—these truths are so closely connected, that they run into each other, and seem almost the same. It is then a self-evident truth, that to do good, or to communicate happiness, is right or duty; and to have done it is virtue or merit; that is, deserves love and gratitude from the party who receives the benefit, and esteem from every other. But in the first of these principles are included all the duties of charity; compassion, forgiveness, &c.—in the latter all the

the duties of piety; adoration, thanks, giving, resignation, &c. For these are inseparable from that gratitude which we owe to God, and the esteem which is due to his moral perfections, to that goodness and mercy which are shed over all his works.

Piety and benevolence are duties equally incumbent on all intelligent creatures. Temperance is a duty respecting only such rational beings as have appetites and passions to govern, and consists in governing them as reason requires. A great part of this duty may be resolved into that of charity or benevolence, the principal obstacle to which is the gratification of our appetites and passions: but the whole of it is not, as it is necessary to observe, comprized in this duty.

The passions and appetites were many of them given, and in their natural tendency lead us, to promote the good of others; others to secure and increase our own private happiness. The first of these may be safely indulged, care only being taken that no particular affection towards any object interfere with a more general good,

good. In the government of the latter the virtue of such mixed beings as we are principally consists. They are these selfish passions chiefly, which suggest the motives to vice, and seduce us from our duty. These are, first, to be controuled by the great principle above-mentioned. When the general good requires it, they are to be resigned and sacrificed. Even the love of life itself will be intemperate, if indulged to the hurt of others; and there are certainly many cases in which it is right and duty to resign it.

In this self-command, this power of controuling our passions and appetites by reason, consists the principal part of human virtue. Hence every action that shews this power over ourselves, tho' not in itself virtuous, is looked upon with admiration and applause. Hence the honour paid to courage, intrepidity, &c. Hence too all such voluntary acts of discipline as are intended to gain the mastery over our passions, and to get the habit of self-command, abstinence from lawful pleasures, acts of self-denial and mortification, are strictly virtuous.

But

But there is another duty of temperance entirely independent of this first principle; which is that of directing the passions and appetites of the body to their proper use; and not indulging them beyond the ends for which they were intended. As these were given us chiefly to maintain and preserve the health and activity both of mind and body, to indulge them so far as to impair this health or strength, is plainly contrary to reason and nature. To inflame those passions, which it is the business of reason to controul, to give the reins to appetite, and to deprive ourselves of the use of our reason by intemperance, is to abandon our moral character, and to expose ourselves wilfully to the incursion of all manner of guilt and sin. But, without appealing to these consequences, it is certain that intemperance, in the higher degree of it, drunkenness, prostitution, &c. appear at sight to be criminal and wrong, and to carry moral pollution along with them. And, if every endeavour by discipline and exercise to improve our virtue be itself virtuous, it is certain that every self-indulgence by which the
passions

passions are inflamed, the appetites quickened, or reason impaired, must be in the same degree vicious. The rule of duty then consisting of the three great heads; piety, charity, and temperance, is reducible to a few of the plainest principles, such as are not only easy, but self-evident, and conspicuous to all capacities. Whoever has reason, must have conscience, or a rule by which to judge of his own actions here, and to make him capable of being judged hereafter. Hence ignorance is never allowed an excuse for neglecting or violating the common duties of life. And hence a moral sense has been thought necessary to account for that sudden approbation of virtue, and natural antipathy to vice, by which the mind as readily distinguishes the beauty and deformity of actions, as the eye of the body does external objects.

F I N I S